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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

West African Mud Turtle

Pelusios castaneus

Pelusios castaneus is a medium-sized turtle from western and central Africa. The shell grows to 18-28 cm, and the species can live 30-50 years. It is hardy, active and greedy and needs a large, filtered tank with warm water, a warm basking spot and UVB. The animals draw the head in sideways under the rim of the shell, and the males chase the females hard.

Family: Pelomedusidae Former name: *Emys castanea; Pelusios derbianus; Pelusios seychellensis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**18-28 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**30-50 years**
Active	**By day and at night**
Lifestyle	**Semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Savanna, rainforest and wetland**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 75 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**32-36 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 15-25 cm
Water temperature	**24-27 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, plants, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**11-27 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**53-75 days** at 27-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Not Evaluated (NE)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

Keep the animal in a large aquarium or a tub, not in an ordinary terrarium. The tank must be at least five times as long as the shell and half as wide as it is long, with the land area counted as part of the floor area.

TEMPERATURE

The water must be 24-27 °C. Warmer water makes the animal restless, and in cooler water it loses its appetite and seeks warmth. A water heater behind a plastic guard is normally necessary, unless the room is warm enough.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Air humidity matters little for an aquatic turtle; 50-80 % in the room is suitable. The air above the tank must be warm and free of draughts, because cold, damp air increases the risk of respiratory infections.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

The water must be kept clean, because the species does not shed its scutes, so dirt stays on the shell. Water depth is 15-25 cm for adults, preferably gradually sloping, and about 10 cm for hatchlings.

LIGHTING AND UVB

UVB is necessary for vitamin D3 and calcium absorption, and it also inhibits bacteria on the shell. Adults bask a lot, so there must be a dry, warm basking spot with a powerful lamp, and young must also have a basking spot.

FEEDING

Pelusios castaneus is omnivorous, but leans strongly towards meat. In the wild it eats crustaceans, insects, fish, shrimps, crabs and large snails as well as a little vegetation such as water lettuce and seeds.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Pelusios castaneus is calm, curious and active. The animals usually withdraw when handled, rarely bite, but can scratch with the sharp claws to get free.

NATIVE RANGE

Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo - Brazzaville, Congo - Kinshasa, Angola, Central African Republic and São Tomé & Príncipe.